

Joel Hastings Metcalf was born in Meadville, Pennsylvania on January 4th, 1866, the son of Lewis Herbert and Anna (Hicks) Metcalf.

At the approximate age 14 after borrowing Richard Proctor's book *Other Worlds Than Ours*, from his Sunday school library he developed an interest in astronomy. This interest was further inspired by the conjunction of Jupiter and Mars on May 7th, 1879 when the planets were slightly over one degree apart and /or July 22nd, 1881, when the two planets were separated by only seven minutes of arc. His first telescope was a 3-inch Fitz refractor which was found by a friend of his in an abandoned house. He traded all of his marbles and a jackknife for it. He then carried wood and did other odd chores to earn \$6.00 to have it mounted.

Joel H. Metcalf graduated from Meadville Theological Seminary in 1890, then continued his education at Harvard Divinity School and obtained his degree of Ph.D. at Allegheny Collage in 1892. He married [Elizabeth S. Lockman](#), of Cambridge, Massachusetts in September of 1891. They had two children, a son Dr. Herbert E. Metcalf (July 8, 1892) and their daughter, [Rachel Metcalf Stoneham](#), who later wrote a wonderful article about her life with "father" in the January, 1939 issue of POPULAR ASTRONOMY, which was later republished in the September, 1979 issue of YANKEE magazine.

On September 5th, 2000 I was fortunate enough to have received an e-mail from Reverend Metcalf's Great granddaughter, Marisa Torbert (November 9, 1974) who was able to connect me with, her mother, the Reverend's Granddaughter, Gail Elisabeth Metcalf (November 11, 1951) daughter of Herbert E. Metcalf.

Herbert Metcalf was a Patent Lawyer. According to Gail E. Metcalf, Herbert, adopted her when he was 59 years of age, he died when she was just 6 years old. Until his death at 65 years of age he continued in his father's tradition of never ending energy and service to his fellow man. So strong was his faith in the Unitarian Church that when he moved to California, finding no Unitarian Church there, he refused to change faiths by attending another church. It was Herbert's wife, Gail's mother, that raised her and her brother as Presbyterian.

As a Unitarian Minister active in the social issues of the time, his commitment to the community is expressed through his powerful sermons criticizing child labor, poor wages and social injustice and is backed by his devotion to civic duty.

He served in Burlington, Vermont (1893-1903) during which time he interrupted his ministry for a year in 1902 to attend Oxford University where he is said to have attended an average of twenty-five lectures weekly on philosophy and religion and was also given the keys to the observatory by [Professor Turner](#), spending much time on astronomical problems.

After Oxford, being at risk of a nervous breakdown, he took a year off to rest before returning to the ministry at [Taunton, Massachusetts](#) (1904/5-1910). While in Taunton he lived at the "Old Parsonage" at [54 Summer Street](#).

At this approximate time in his life Reverend Metcalf began an interest in [grinding lenses](#) and also began a long lasting correspondence with [Prof. W. W. Campbell](#), Director of the

Lick Observatory. It was also at this time that Rev. Metcalf began his work/research in cooperation with Harvard Observatory where he also became a member of the Visiting Committee. While living in Taunton he wrote at least three articles for [POPULAR ASTRONOMY](#) magazine and at least one for the [ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF THE PACIFIC](#). He was also a member of the Visiting Committee for Brown University's, [Ladd Observatory](#), in Providence, Rhode Island. (Data is needed in this area! Please contact me, at the email address below, if you can help!!) He was next called to [Winchester, Massachusetts](#) (1910-1920), where many of his sermons and editorials were more than occasionally published in the *Winchester Star*, and finally to Portland, Maine (1920-1925) where he died on February 23rd, 1925 at the age of 59.

As a humanitarian he volunteered his services in France during W.W.I through the Y.M.C.A. (1918-1919) delivering supplies and news from home to the [3rd Division, 7th Infantry](#) along the front lines at [Chateau Thierry](#). While there he was also known to have carried wounded soldiers and/or their equipment during frequent 20 and 25 mile marches. When there were no wounded he was known to have marched ahead of the soldiers encouraging them onward in song and spirit. [In August of 1918 he received praise from Joseph J. Brown, 1st Lieut. Co. D, 7th Inf.](#)

After returning to the United States in 1919 he came home to Winchester, Massachusetts for a brief time. Later in 1919 he and two other members of the Unitarian Church volunteered to go to Transylvania to help with the reconstruction of that country. He visited many remote parts of the area, traveling by automobile, making one remarkable journey between Cluj and Bucharest, returning not without peril, with about \$10,000 in currency. He made a journey out from Transylvania to England, returning with supplies. He was so loved by the people there that when two other commissions were sent back to the area in 1922 and 1924 and were continually asked when Dr. Metcalf would ever return again. This is another area of his life where data is badly needed "PLEASE HELP"!

As an amateur astronomer he discovered 5 comets, ([one unconfirmed in November, 1916 according to Dr. Brian G. Marsden of the Smithsonian Observatory, Cambridge, Massachusetts](#)) two of which being periodic, the first being [P/Metcalf 1906VI](#) which was lost but recovered in 1991 by Howard Brewington, it is now redesignated [97P/Metcalf-Brewington](#). The other was the recovery of Comet P/Brorsen, redesignated [P/Brorsen-Metcalf](#), now designated [23P/Brorsen-Metcalf](#). Dr. Metcalf is also credited with the discovery of [41 numbered asteroids](#). His own method for photographing asteroids was by....." Instead of guiding a long exposure at the diurnal rate so that stars formed dots and asteroids trailed, he moved the telescope to compensate for the average motion of the asteroids in that particular part of the sky. "He could therefore, photograph fainter planets because their images were almost circular, while stars appeared as trails... He usually took two exposures of about half an hour each, shifting the plate slightly between them. With the 12-inch, he could record planets as faint as magnitude 13.5". He also discovered several variable stars, 3 of which are RV Leonis (1919), SV Hydræ (1921) and WZ Ophiuchi (1922).

[As an astro-photographer he astonished the professional astronomers by photographing Saturn's newly discovered satellite Phoebe using his 12-inch doublet \(mentioned below\).](#)

As a telescope maker he has graced the astronomical world with an 8- inch f/80 inch ("[Broken-backed](#)") comet hunter kept at South Hero, Vermont for use during his summer vacations, a [10- inch photographic triplet ... \(history of the 10-inch\) ... \(data on the 10-inch\)](#) now newly restored and in the possession of the [Boyden Observatory, University of the Orange Free State](#), Bloemfontein, South Africa, a [12- inch doublet](#) (which he used in Taunton, Mass.) located at, Oak Ridge Observatory, Harvard, Massachusetts, and a 16- inch f/5.25 doublet, also located at Oak Ridge Observatory. He was in the process of making the 13- inch triplet used in the discovery of the planet Pluto when he died in 1925 (it was completed by C. A. Robert Lundin of Alvan Clark and Sons). [NOTE: It was my privilege to design the plate and the plaque that will be placed on the Metcalf 10-inch in South Africa.](#) ([Large image of design](#))

He wrote one book, [World Stories](#) of which I am not yet familiar.

A living memorial to his life were the *900 persons* that filled the First Church in Portland during his funeral, the list included:

**plain people *the clergy of the city*representatives of various organizations*

**conspicuous among the crowd werethe American Legion *and Justices*

of the Supreme Court

[My visit to the Reverend](#)

Those wishing to pay their respects to the Reverend may visit:

Evergreen Cemetery Portland ,Maine.....(207) 797-4597

Family Plot of Metcalf Joel. H

Section: AA/Lot:677/Position: #1

Position #2 = Elizabeth L. Metcalf, Wife, (Died 85 years old, March 1, 1955 Cremated)

Position #3 = Rachel Metcalf Stoneham ,Doughtier,Died 77 years old, July 11, 1975 Cremated)

Position #4 = Joel Metcalf Stoneham, Grandson, Died 50 yrs old, 1979, Marker only)